

# **CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP: A CASE OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**

**Dr. Razali Bin Mat Zin**  
**Department of Management and Marketing**  
**King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals**  
**Dhahran, Saudi Arabia**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper reports the use of the gap-analysis technique in order to investigate the greatest needs of elementary school principals, as they perceive them, in terms of pre-service and in-service education. Research attempted to investigate the following three questions: (i) Which are the most important areas (of the 37 presented on a questionnaire) so that an elementary school principal is considered to be effective?; (ii) Where do the greatest needs for improvement lie; and (iii) What suggestions can be made for improvements in the education or in-service development for principals? Results indicate that primary school principals in Brunei Darussalam do not differ from their counterparts in other places of the world where research is taking place in the area of effective school leadership.

## **INTRODUCTION**

On practical level, leadership is a topic that almost everyone is interested in at one time or another. For political scientists this interest manifests itself in a question, "Who shall rule?" Psychologists take a different slant on the question and ask, "who should rule?" People do have vested in who is running their government, schools, company or non-profit organizations; and because of this interest thousands of books and articles have been written about the topic of leadership.

## **EFFECTIVENESS AND LEADERSHIP: SELECTED LITERATURE**

Research and practice have shown that amongst the characteristics of effective schools, the quality of school leadership is of paramount importance (Brookover, 2000; Edmonds, 2000; Fuller, 2002; Levine & Lezotte, 2002; Lezotte, 2002; Mortimore, et. al., 2001; Reynolds & Cuttance, 2002; Rutter, et al.; 2002; Walberg, 2001). The perceptions arising from these studies are that the school leader of an individual school is considered to be the single most important person who can actually transform the academic and other achievements of a school. In order to be able to do that, principals need to be well-acquainted with themselves, their strengths and weaknesses. It was with these thoughts that this piece of research was undertaken with the hope that it would, to some extent, shed some light in school principals' self-evaluation and self-knowledge so that, through this acquired knowledge, a way of improvement would emerge in order to enhance the quality of school leadership.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Procedures**

A questionnaire was sent out in mid-January, 2003 to all primary schools of Brunei. By the end of February 2003, about fifty-nine percent (59%) of the questionnaires had been returned and

the statistical analyses began using the "SPSS for the Macintosh". Analyses were conducted using primarily means, standard deviations, frequencies and t-tests. The method of "gap analysis" was used to find the areas with most need for improvement as follows: (i) the two means for each one of the statements of the questionnaire were subtracted from each other; and (ii) the greater the difference (i.e., the larger the gap) the more need for improvement there was.

## Questionnaire

The questionnaire included most of the basic effective principal characteristics that have been identified through research in the form of statements. It consisted of 37 statements which made reference to the main functions of the principalship. These statements were divided into seven areas: (i) School Climate; (ii) School Improvement; (iii) Curriculum Management; (iv) Personnel Management; (v) Administration and Fiscal/Facilities Management; (vi) Student Management; and (vii) Professional Growth and Development.

There were two columns in the questionnaire with Likert-type scales on both sides of each item. The first column asked the respondents to indicate the extent (or the degree) to which they regard the specific statement as important to being an effective principal. The scale used was an interval Likert-type scale from 1 to 5; where 5 indicated that a statement was "very important" and 1 conveyed the respondent's view that the statement was considered "very unimportant". The second column was used so that the principals would indicate the degree to which they felt they had a need for improvement. A Likert-type scale was used here as well from 1 to 5; where 5 indicated "very small need" and 1 indicated "great need". In both scales the principals had the opportunity to indicate "DA" (does not apply). The 37 questionnaire statements follow:

- 1. Fosters collegiality and team-building among staff, encouraging their active involvement in decision-making;*
- 2. Mediates and facilitates effective resolution of conflicts in a timely fashion;*
- 3. Has a clear sense of the school's mission: actively involves the staff in planning and decision-making in order to accomplish the mission;*
- 4. Communicates and promotes high expectation levels for staff and student performance in an enabling and supportive way;*
- 5. Provides recognition for excellence and achievement;*
- 6. Initiates and supports programs and actions that facilitate a positive, caring climate for learning and an orderly purposeful environment;*
- 7. Determines and builds a common vision with staff for school improvement; directs planning activities and implements programs collaboratively with staff to ensure attainment of the school's mission;*
- 8. Identifies, analyses, and applies research findings (e.g. effective school research correlates) to facilitate school improvement;*
- 9. Ensures that curriculum renewal is continuous and responsive to student needs;*

10. *Provides instructional resources and materials to support teaching staff in accomplishing instructional goals;*
11. *Systematically and continuously monitors instructional and managerial processes to ensure that program activities are related to program outcomes; uses these findings for corrective action and improvement, as well as for recognition of success;*
12. *Effectively administers and integrates all special programs with the regular program;*
13. *Is a cooperative and contributing member of the whole educational establishment (i.e. Ministry of Education);*
14. *Uses developmental evaluation effectively and comprehensively with all staff by systematically observing instruction, recording observations, and regularly conducting formative and summative evaluation conferences;*
15. *Confers with subordinates regarding their professional growth; works jointly with them to develop and accomplish improvement goals;*
16. *Sets a specific teacher observation instrument and ensures that evaluations clearly and accurately represent staff performance;*
17. *Clearly defines expectations for staff performance regarding instructional strategies, classroom management and communication with the public;*
18. *Is effective in interviewing, selecting and orienting new staff, makes sound recommendations relative to personnel placement, transfer, retention and dismissal;*
19. *Makes sure that different reports to the Ministry of Education are accurate and are timely submitted;*
20. *Complies with educational policies, as well as laws and regulations, in pursuing the mission of the school;*
21. *Is effective in scheduling activities and the use of resources needed to accomplish determined goals;*
22. *Develops budgets based upon documented program needs, estimated enrolment, personnel and other fiscal needs, implements programs within budget limits; maintains fiscal control, and accurately responds to fiscal information;*
23. *Monitors the use, care and replacement of capital equipment;*
24. *Manages all school facilities effectively; efficiently supervises their maintenance to ensure clean, orderly and safe buildings and grounds;*
25. *Displays respect for other people's time by being punctual to district and committee meetings. Responds to time limits for breaks and gives attention to proceedings;*
26. *Effectively develops and communicates to students, staff and parents school guidelines for*

*student conduct;*

- 27. Ensures that school rules are uniformly observed and the consequences of misconduct are applied equitably to all students;*
- 28. Effectively conducts conferences with parents, students and teachers concerning school and student issues, conveying both the positive aspects of student behavior as well as problem areas;*
- 29. Maintains student folders which contain the required data to document placement in a program that deviates from regular/main streamed education;*
- 30. Uses information provided through assessment instruments, the school appraisal process and evaluative feedback from line supervisors to improve performance;*
- 31. Strives to improve leadership skills through self-initiated professional development activities;*
- 32. Utilizes information and insights gained in professional development programs for self-improvement;*
- 33. Disseminates ideas and information to other professionals; provides leadership in addressing the challenges facing the profession;*
- 34. Demonstrates awareness of school/community needs and initiates activities to meet those identified needs;*
- 35. Demonstrates the use of appropriate and effective techniques for community and parent involvement;*
- 36. Emphasizes and nurtures two-way communication between the school and community;*
- 37. Projects a positive image to the community.*

The group of principals was asked to complete the questionnaire directed at ascertaining their perceptions of the ten most important functions of effective principalship and the greatest needs for improvement. These perceptions were further analyzed for any correlations with the gender or experience of the respondents.

### **Sample**

All the three hundred and seventy-seven (377) primary school principals in Brunei Darussalam were asked to participate in this research. Two hundred and twenty-one (221) which comprised 58.6% of this group responded. Of those responding, 75% were men, 25% were women. The great majority (82%) were aged between 50 and 59 years. Another sample characteristic is that more than half of the principals (52.5%) had less than 4 years of experience in the principalship. About 16% had experience between 5 and 9 years and about 19% had more than 20 years of experience as principals. With regards to their education, 88% were educated only at the level of the *Certificate of Teaching* (a 2-year college below the Bachelor's level), 10% of those responding hold a Bachelor's degree and only 2% hold a Master's degree. No principal holds a

Ph.D.

## FINDINGS

### A. Principals' Ratings Of Effectiveness

The group selected the ten functions listed in Table 1, in order of priority as the most important features for effective principalship.

**Table 1**

#### The Ten Most Important Statements According to the Principals' Responses

STATEMENTS	STANDARD DEVIATION
1. Fosters collegiality and team-building among staff, encouraging their active involvement in decision-making	0.51
20. Complies with educational policies- as well as laws and regulations, in pursuing the mission of the school.	0.58
24. Manages all school facilities effectively, efficiently supervises their maintenance to ensure clean, orderly and safe buildings and grounds.	0.52
25. Displays respect for other people's time by being punctual to district and committee meetings. Responds to time limits for breaks and gives attention to proceedings.	0.58
27. Ensures that school rules are uniformly observed and that consequences of misconduct are applied equitably to all students.	0.54
13. Is a cooperative and contributing member of the whole educational establishment (i.e. Ministry of Education).	0.56
6. Initiates and supports programs and actions that facilitate a positive, caring climate for learning and an orderly, purposeful environment.	0.55
7. Determines and builds a common vision with staff for school improvement; directs planning activities and implements programs collaboratively with staff to ensure attainment of school's mission.	0.54
4. Communicates and promotes high expectation levels for staff and student performance in an enabling, supportive way.	0.55
22. Develops budgets based upon documented program needs, estimated enrolment, personnel and other fiscal needs; implements programs within budget limits; maintains fiscal control; accurately reports fiscal information.	0.67

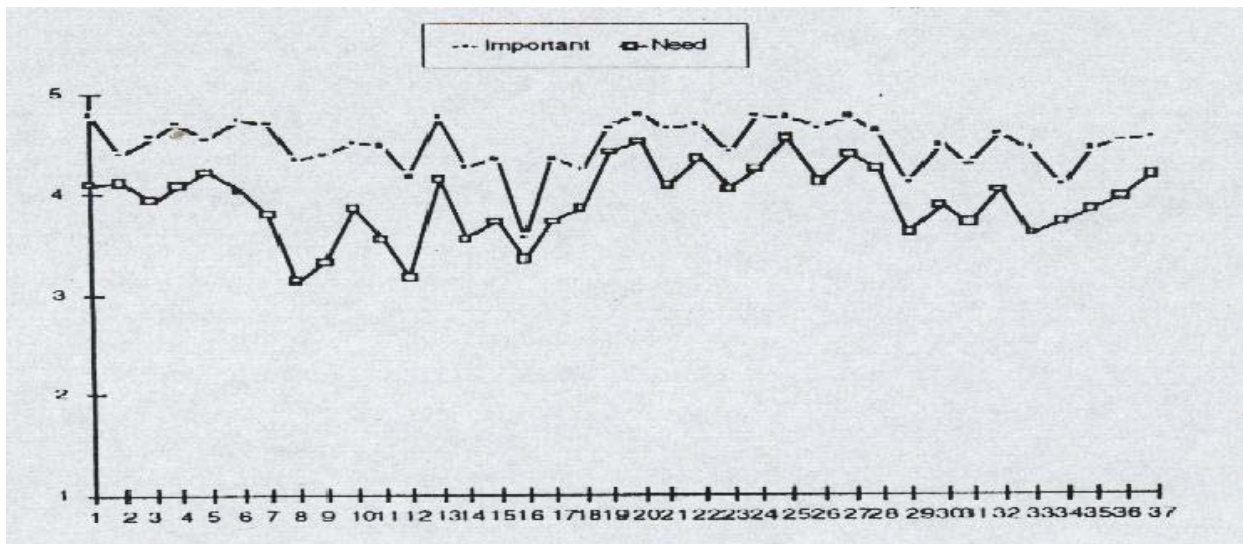
It appears that Brunei Darussalam primary school principals acknowledge importance in two general areas. First, they attach importance to human relations among school personnel as shown by the statements concerning: (i) the strengthening of collegiality and the feeling of being a team; (ii) the creation of a positive, human school climate; and (iii) the cooperation among staff for the creation of a common vision for school improvement. Second, principals seem to attach importance to their relations with the Ministry of Education and to bureaucratic procedures both inside and outside the school as indicated by particular statements: (i) complies with educational policies, as well as laws and regulations, in pursuing the mission of the school; (ii) insures that school rules are uniformly observed and that consequences of misconduct are applied equitably to all students; and (iii) is a cooperative and contributing member of the whole educational establishment (i.e. Ministry of Education).

This prioritizing of functions masks, however, the equally important finding that all 37 items were considered very important and the overall ratings accorded to each one differed very little. The general mean of all statements was 4.48 (on a scale from 1 to 5; with 5 meaning "very important"). Only one was rated less important, that which suggested using a specific evaluation instrument (or method) for observing classroom teaching for the purpose of evaluating instruction (mean 3.56). This indicates that the primary school principals of Brunei Darussalam, in general, are in agreement with the characteristics of the effective principal as found by research studies in other countries, or in other words, they believe that the qualities described in the questionnaire items are essential to being an effective principal.

### B. Principals' Ratings of Needs

In Table 2 the top line indicates the importance accorded by the principals for each statement, whereas the lower line indicates where the greatest needs for improvement exist to being more

**Table 2**



**Mean Responses for the 37-Item Questionnaire**

effective as a principal. The greater the gap between importance and need, the bigger the need for improvement there is. The greatest need for improvement seems to relate to statement **No.8** which deals with the identification, analysis and application of research findings to facilitate school improvement.

In Table 3, the ten statements where the greatest needs for improvement exist are presented in more detail. The ten statements are presented beginning with the statement which was perceived as having the greatest need for improvement and ending with the one with the least need for improvement. In the third column are the percentages of the principals who indicated that they have a “great need” for improvement of their performance in the specific statement.

**Table 3**

**The Ten Statements Where the Greatest Needs for Improvement Exist According to the Principals' Responses**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>%</b>
8. Identifies, analyzes, and applies research findings (e.g., effective school research correlates) to facilitate school improvement.	1.22	40
9. Ensures that curriculum renewal is continuous and responsive to student needs	1-06	36
12. Effectively administers and integrates all special programs with the regular program.	1.0	40
11. Systematically and continuously monitors instructional and managerial processes to ensure that program activities are related to program outcomes; uses these findings for corrective action and improvement, as well as for recognition of success.	0.92	27
7. Determines and builds a common vision with staff for school improvement; directs planning activities and implements programs collaboratively with staff to ensure attainment of the school's mission.	0-91	26
33. Disseminates ideas and information to other professionals; provides leadership in addressing the challenges facing the profession.	0.84	34
14. Uses developmental evaluation effectively and comprehensively with all staff by systematically observing instruction, recording observations, and regularly conducting formative and summative evaluation conferences.	0.72	31
1. Fosters collegiality and team-building among staff, encouraging their active involvement in decision-making.	0.71	26
5- Provides recognition for excellence and achievement.	0.71	21
4- Communicates and promotes high expectation levels for staff and student performance in an enabling, supportive way.	0.64	20

The results in Table 3 can be divided into two groups of needs. The first group of needs lies in the area of the introduction of new ideas in the school unit that are based on research findings. This fact is shown by the percentages of the principals indicating that they have a need of improvement in the areas of (i) identification, analysis, and application of research findings (e.g., effective school research correlates) to facilitate school improvement (40% of the respondents indicated that they have a great need for improvement in this area); (ii) ensuring that curriculum renewal is continuous and responsive to student needs (36%); (iii) systematically and continuously monitoring instructional and managerial processes to ensure that program activities are related to program outcomes; using these findings for corrective action and improvement, as well as for recognition of success (27%); and (iv) disseminating ideas and information to other professionals; providing leadership in addressing the challenges facing the profession (34%). This expression of needs for identification, analysis, and application of research findings does not come as a surprise since educational research activity in Brunei Darussalam is very limited. There was no specific knowledge of what was going on in the rest of the world and principals feel the need to keep informed. A second group of needs is presented in the broader area of personnel evaluation and transmittal of expectations to staff. This is clearly indicated by the percentages of principals declaring the need for improvement in the areas of: (i) using developmental evaluation effectively and comprehensively with all staff by systematically observing instruction, recording observations, and regularly conducting formative and summative evaluation conferences (31%); and (ii) communicating and promoting high expectation levels for staff and student performance in an enabling, supportive way (20%). The expression of a need to use developmental evaluation methods and/or instruments is warranted since principals in Brunei Darussalam are asked to assist (as instructional leaders) their staff without any education or knowledge as to how this might be accomplished.

### **C. Does Gender Influence Perceptions?**

As can be seen from the t-tests presented in Table 4, it seems that women principals regard six out of the seven areas of the questionnaire as more important when compared with their male counterparts. The area in which no statistically significant difference was observed is the one concerning "School Improvement" where the principals of both sexes seem to have the same opinion. It seems that women principals attach more importance to the seven questionnaire areas when compared with their male counterparts.

It is interesting that female principals in Brunei Darussalam feel that most areas described in the questionnaire are more important when compared with their male counterparts. This could be due to the fact that women in Brunei Darussalam have been deprived of positions of authority in the educational system for a number of years and, therefore, have greater felt need for development.



**Table 4****Differences in the Importance Attached to the Seven Questionnaire Areas With Regards to the Gender of the Respondents**

<b>AREAS</b>	<b>MEANS</b>	<b>t-tests</b>	<b>P value</b>
School Climate	Men = 4.56 Women = 4.75	-3.44	0.001*
School Management	Men = 4.48 Women = 4.61	-1.68	0.096
Curriculum Management	Men = 4.39 Women = 4.65	-3.83	0.0001*
Personnel Management	Men = 4.08 Women = 4.33	-2.51	0.013*
Administration, Fiscal & Facilities Management	Men = 4.63 Women = 4.76	-1.98	0.050*
Student Management	Men = 4.45 Women = 4.73	-4.22	0.0001*
Professional Growth & Development	Men = 4.35 Women = 4.60	-3.11	0.002*

\* Statistically significant difference

**D. Does Experience Influence Perceptions?**

Years of experience as principals are related to some differences as to how needs are perceived as indicated in Table 5. The principals with the fewest years of experience (0 to 4 years) indicate that they have a greater need for improvement

**Table 5****Differences in the Existence of the Greatest Needs for Improvement With Regards to the Years of Experience as Principals**

<b>AREAS</b>	<b>MEANS</b>	<b>t-tests</b>	<b>p VALUE</b>
School Climate	Experience < 4 yrs = 4.03 Experience > 4 yrs =4.22	-1.34	0.18
School Improvement	Experience < 4 yrs = 3.33 Experience > 4 yrs =3.61	-1.99	0.05*
Curriculum Management	Experience < 4 yrs = 3.54 Experience > 4 yrs =3.73	-1.25	0.21
Personnel Management	Experience < 4 yrs = 3.50 Experience > 4 yrs =3.8	-1.97	0.05*
Administration & Fiscal/ Facilities Management	Experience < 4 yrs = 2.25 Experience > 4 yrs =4.47	-1.55	0.12
Student Management	Experience < 4 yrs = 3.97 Experience > 4 yrs =4.15	-1.13	0.26
Professional Growth & Development	Experience < 4 yrs = 3.75 Experience > 4 yrs =4.22	-2.11	0.03*

\* Statistically significant difference in the areas of "School Improvement", "Personnel Management", and "Professional Growth and Development", when compared with their more experienced counterparts who indicated that they had greater need for improvement in all areas. Only the differences in these three areas were statistically significant.

The fact that principals with fewer than four years of experience felt the need to improve in the areas of "School Improvement", "Personnel Management" and "Professional Growth and Development", seems to indicate that a principal can learn "on the job" about school improvement and dealing with personnel and, therefore, the more years of experience the less need there is. As for professional growth and development, it is natural for principals who are new on the job to have a greater need for development. As for the remaining four areas it seems that more or fewer years on the job does not make any difference. This could be explained as follows: "School Climate" is more or less taken for granted in Brunei Darussalam primary schools because they are usually small and relations among staff are cordial and therefore, the principal does not need to do much in order to foster a positive school climate. The area of

"Curriculum Management" is not one of high priority since the principals are not really involved in it (it is the inspectors' job from Ministry of Education) and therefore, having been a principal for more or fewer years does not really make a difference for this area. As for "Student Management" it seems that this is an easy area to deal with in Brunei Darussalam because primary schools tend to be small in terms of numbers and students are well-disciplined.

## **UNIVERSALITIES OF MANAGEMENT:**

### **SOME OBSERVATIONS**

First, the fact that all respondents considered all statements as very important for their effectiveness as principals should be underlined. This indicates that the characteristics of the effective principal (as were presented in the questionnaire) are valid for primary school principals in Brunei Darussalam irrespective of the place where they live or the educational system which they serve. This fact is very encouraging for research on the effective principal because it provides another piece of evidence of the universality of these characteristics.

Second, the greatest needs appear in the area of "School Improvement". It is not a coincidence that principals who participated in this research declare their need for improvement in the general area of school renewal. Since the majority of school principals in Brunei Darussalam do not have any formal or systematic education in the area of educational administration, they have no new ideas they can introduce to the school units which they lead or they do not know how to introduce change. At the same time, these principals feel more and more the need to become change agents for their schools and communities, and, therefore, expressing a need to learn how to do that.

Third, there seems to be some need for improvement in the area of Special Education. Forty percent (40%) of the respondents indicated that they have a need for improvement in directing students in programs that are outside regular/mainstreamed education. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the respondents indicate that they have a need in the area of "Professional Growth and Development". Basically, the principals who responded feel the need to be informed about what is happening in the area of educational research and be able to disseminate research information and introduce new ideas to their staff. This need relates to their role as the informed leader (Bennis et al., 2002; Sweeney, 2002; Hall & Hord, 2002). Principals seek further education and in-service opportunities for personal development as well as professional fulfillment.

The principals attached great importance on interpersonal relations with their school staff. This emphasis on the group can be explained by the fact that primary schools in Brunei Darussalam are usually small (both with regards to students as well as with regards to teaching staff) and, therefore, human relations become very important for school effectiveness. For instance, imagine a situation with a small school of 10 or 15 teachers who do not get along; it would be highly inefficient (or almost impossible) to operate such a school. Differences among a small number of colleagues or lack of collegiality do not tend to become a major problem because these differences can be diluted with organizational structures in the larger context.

Principals attach great importance to their relations with the Ministry of Education. This can be interpreted as a result of the very centralized educational system of Brunei Darussalam, where School and Ministry of Education relationships are of vital importance both for the school as a unit which is totally dependent on the Ministry, as well as for the principal, for further

professional attainment and future promotions.

In general, the greatest needs seem to exist in areas where the principals have never been educated or in-serviced, such as ways of improving their schools through the introduction of findings of current educational research into the everyday practices of schools. Also, a need seems to exist in the area of curriculum management, in-service of teaching personnel, school climate, issues dealing with teacher evaluation, etc.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The most important proposition one can make is probably the urgent need to create sound graduate programs in educational administration and evaluation to help future principals prepare for the task awaiting them. Such a program will have to prepare principals on effective teaching processes as revealed in the effective schools research (Brookover, 2000; Edmonds, 2000; Fuller, 2002; Levine & Lezotte, 2002; Lezotte, 2002). The creation of such a program should be a top priority so as to prevent more teachers from becoming principals without some basic notions of educational administration.

A second proposition is the need for continuous in-service education for principals. A full-fledged in-service program could involve issues such as the ones mentioned above and be provided in different ways, i.e., through local or regional conferences. In addition, the Ministry of Education could subsidize travel abroad in order to enable principals to take part in international conferences. Another way of keeping them updated on new developments in school administration would be the provision of “sabbaticals” as seen in universities. Principals could go away for three or six months (with their salary paid in full) for the purpose of renewing and re-educating themselves, conducting research, or just use this time in whatever manner the principal sees fit for his/her own benefit and professional growth.

A third proposition would be the creation within the Ministry of Education of a research unit to collect and catalogue recent research findings in the general area of school administration as well as on matters of broader educational research. This unit would serve the purpose of disseminating small synopses of research findings to the schools.

In sum, primary school principals in Brunei Darussalam do not differ markedly from their counterparts in other places of the world where research is taking place in the area of effective school leadership. Furthermore, it became obvious that the principals themselves know which areas they need to improve in order to become more effective. The task is now on those who have the policy-making and decision-making authority to use research findings in order to conduct needs-assessment studies of these school principals and then proceed in meeting those needs bearing in mind the needs of the larger context in which the whole educational system operates.

## **REFERENCES**

- Bennis, W., Benne, K. and Chin, R. 2002. *The planning of change*. Illinios: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Brookover, W., Beacy, C. Flood, P. Schweitzer, J. & Wisenbaker, J. 2000. *School social systems and student achievement*. New York: Praeger.

Cook, B. 1990. *Strategic planning for America's schools*. Montgomery: American Association of School Administrators.

Edmonds, R. 2000. Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership*, 37(1): 15-24.

Firestone, W. & Wilson, B. 1985. Using bureaucratic and cultural linkages to improve instruction: The principals' contributions. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 21: 7-30.

Fuller, B. 2002. School effects in the third world. *Review of Educational Research*, 57(3): 255-292.

Hall, G. & Hord, S. 2002. *Change in schools: Facilitating the process*. New York: SUNY Press.

Levine, D. & Lezotte, L. 2002. *Unusually effective schools: A review and analysis of research and practice*. Madison: NCSERD Publications.

Lezotte, L.W. 2002. *Selected resources compiles for 7<sup>th</sup> annual effective school conference*. Arizona: National School Conference Institute.

Mortimore, P, Sammons, P, Ecob, R. & Stool, L. 2001. *School matters: The junior years*. Salisbury: Open Books.

Reynolds, D. & Cuttance, P. 2002. *School effectiveness: Research, policy and practice*. London: Cassell.

Rutter, M & Fraser, H. 2002. *Fifteen thousand hours: Secondary schools and their effects on children*. London: Open Books.

Sweeney, J. 2002. *Training educational leaders as change agents: The effects of internships*. *Educational Technology*, 42: 45.

Walberg, H. 2001. Improving the school leadership in advanced countries. *Review of Educational Research*, 91(1): 25-69.